

Women and checkpoints in Palestine

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this article is to bring Palestinian women to the centre of a discussion about the gendered dimensions of Israel's convoluted permit system and checkpoint security infrastructure. Drawing on fieldwork close to one of the largest checkpoint terminals in the West Bank, Checkpoint 300 between Bethlehem and Jerusalem, the article develops knowledge about checkpoints in three important ways: i) as gendered spaces that regulate women's mobility differently from that of men; ii) as spaces that produce particular embodied experiences for women; and iii) as security mechanisms that disrupt and regulate relations of care. This knowledge builds towards the main argument of the article: Palestinian women's lives are profoundly affected by Israel's imposition of permit systems and checkpoints in terms of highly gendered impositions of (im)mobility, embodied experience and relations of care. The research presented here thus makes two wider contributions to research on security to do with how the checkpoint brings the politics of gender and occupation to the fore, and how security infrastructure connects to the politics of care under military occupation.

Keywords: Checkpoints, gender and security, Israel, military occupation, mobility, Palestine.

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INTRODUCTION

Checkpoints are an integral part of Israel's colonial security infrastructure that affect the lives of all Palestinians in the Occupied Territories. In the West Bank, the development of large 'checkpoint terminals' (see Mansbach, 2009; Weizman, 2007: 139-160) has imposed extensive periods of waiting, invasive interrogation and identity checks and the constant threat of violence on Palestinians who move between towns and villages and to East Jerusalem and Israel. The checkpoint terminals around large urban West Bank centres such as Huwara (near Nablus), Qalandia (Ramallah) and Checkpoint 300 (Bethlehem) are managed via a convoluted permit system (see Berda, 2017) that prolongs and regulates further the process of who crosses and with what (relative) freedom and frequency. Current academic research draws focus to those who cross and the ways that checkpoints have become, for instance, sites of surveillance (Zureik, 2011), arbitrary detention (Kotef & Amir, 2011), ID card checks and confiscation (Tawil-Souri, 2011) and spaces of profound anxiety (Long, 2006), threat (Rijke & Minca, 2019) and humiliation (Griffiths, 2017) for Palestinians. Across this literature, a clear sense emerges of the broader function of checkpoints as a 'normalisation' (Mansbach, 2009) or 'façade of legitimacy' (Kotef & Amir, 2007) of an entrenched occupation, and of how the control of movement serves the broader (bio)political ends of Israel's settler colonial project (Griffiths & Repo, 2018; Pallister-Wilkins, 2016). We thus by now have quite developed scholarly analyses that complement the ranging literary and journalistic accounts (e.g. Barghouti, 2008; Said, 1995a) from Palestinian perspectives that attest to the claim that 'crossing barriers is perhaps the single most *definitive* experience in contemporary Palestinian life' (Abourahme, 2011: 453, our emphasis).

Across these many accounts, however, it is men's voices and experiences that are 'definitive' of Palestinian life in this way, as most accounts focus on the larger numbers of men who cross checkpoints, especially at busy times when crowded conditions attract the attention of reporters and researchers. Women's experiences of checkpoints remain on the margins of scholarly analysis. At these margins, however, there is some crucial work that draws attention to checkpoints as spaces where women experience gendered modes of discrimination (e.g. Braverman, 2011) and/or enact important forms of resistance (e.g. Richter-Devroe, 2011). Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian's key work on the surveillance and restriction of women's pregnant and birthing bodies, for example, illustrates in stark detail the centrality of checkpoints in the 'creat[ion] [of] a social geography of horror' (2015, 1195), one that is marked by 'violence against the birthing journey [that] invades women's spaces, time, bodies and psyches through militarised control of their legal status, movement and ability to reach medical facilities and care' (2015, 1202). Rema Hammami's insightful analyses are notable for a simultaneous focus on the potential for violence in checkpoints while also, for example, exploring women's roles in 'normalising or naturalising ... every day

threats' (2015, 7) and the emergence of the gendered body as 'an uncontainable force' (2019, 96) that can 'unmake' the disembodied technological spaces of security. We complement this – and other (e.g. Peteet, 2017; Rijke and Minca, 2018) – work on women and security infrastructure in Palestine with the specific objective of furthering knowledge of women's experiences of checkpoints by analysing women's positions in Israel's notorious 'permit regime' and their first-hand experiences of crossing for a range of every-day purposes (prayer, non-urgent medical care, cultural visits and so forth).

To meet this objective we present interviews from fieldwork with Palestinian women who live close to Israel's 'Separation Wall' and are required to cross one of the largest checkpoint terminals in the West Bank, Checkpoint 300, to reach Jerusalem from their homes near Bethlehem. Specifically, we examine the women's embodied experiences in 'contact zones' (Pratt, 1991: 33) to bring into view the tensions between patriarchal power relations of both the colonizer and colonized in the checkpoint. Our main interest is not to replicate important studies (e.g. Hammami, 2015; Richter-Devroe, 2011) of women's acts of political agency and resistance but rather to examine the ways that the permit and checkpoint system intervenes in and administers relations of care. The research brings decolonial feminist theorizations of the interactive space of the borderlands (Anzaldúa, 1987) into conversation with the politics of care, and thereby contributes to feminist research on the masculinised logics of security (Basham & Vaughan-Williams, 2012; Enloe, 2000), including forms of sex-/gender-/sexuality-based profiling at borders (Currah & Mulqueen, 2011; Ritchie, 2014), the vulnerability of women, children and families at borders and in detention centres (Martin, 2011; Staudt, 2009) and the ways that marginalized women live within gendered and embodied border zones (Krichker, 2019; Smith, 2017). Countering the 'politics of invisibility' (see Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2010) of women in military and conflict, the article builds knowledge about checkpoints in three important ways: i) as gendered spaces that regulate women's mobility differently from that of men; ii) as spaces that produce particular embodied experiences for women; and iii) as security mechanisms that disrupt and regulate relations of care.

The research took place in the village of Al-Walaja near Bethlehem, where we collaborated with a women's organization that facilitated interviews and focus groups on the subject of crossing the nearby Checkpoint 300. This approach intends to facilitate a feminist examination of security infrastructure that 'studies up' – from 'micro' to 'macro' – by taking an embodied approach to knowledge that makes visible practices, experiences and effects that might otherwise remain obscured (Hyndman, 2007: 36; Koch, 2011: 501). As we elaborate below, such an approach enables an understanding of checkpoints as contact zones and borderlands where cultures meet and contest within the highly uneven power relations that constitute colonial space (Anzaldúa, 1987; Pratt, 1991). The decolonial feminist thought of Gloria Anzaldúa and Mary Louise Pratt

encourages attention to the multiplicity of cultures, languages, classes, colonialities and patriarchies that are propelled into motion through encounters. Pratt's (1991: 33) concept of the 'contact zone' refers to the 'social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out in many parts of the world today'. Referring to the US-Mexico border, Anzaldúa conceptualizes the 'borderland' as an 'open wound' where 'the Third World grates against the first and bleeds. And before a scab forms it haemorrhages again, the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country – a border culture' (1987: 25). Both concepts capture the turbulent and unstable politics of encounter, always haunted by contentious power relations, yet also productive of subjects and practices, often in contradictory ways.

Attending to such power relations, the account provided here makes two contributions to wider understandings of security in a colonial context. First, we show how the movement of Palestinian women through the checkpoint brings the politics of gender and occupation to the fore, and in particular the way that colonial security mechanisms situate women within colonial patriarchies (Griffiths & Joronen, 2019; Rought-Brooks et al., 2010; Spivak, 1988). As the women included in the research recounted, their presence in the checkpoint can be alternatively challenged or facilitated by Palestinian men in the checkpoint queues, while the treatment they receive from Israeli security staff is often intended to intimidate. In discussion, we relate these experiences to broader discursive constructions of Palestinian women as by turns (and somewhat paradoxically) 'subservient' to their 'violent hyper-patriarchal men' (Razack, 2008, 4); reproducers of the family life and the demographic necessities of the nation (Abu-Duhou, 2003); and the embodiment of Palestinian resistance and *shahida* (martyrdom) (Amireh 2011). A second contribution is to use the insights of contact zones and borderlands to connect security infrastructure to the politics of care in the context of military occupation. As previous research has shown, security infrastructures such as Checkpoint 300 effect bordering processes that facilitate wage-labour movements and thus reinforce the sexual division of labour in Palestine by positioning men as breadwinners (Griffiths & Repo 2018, 24). To what extent does the question of the sexual division of labour remain relevant if we take their situation as the starting point, and, if so, what do we learn? Taking a lead from the work of Anzaldúa, we approach the narratives of Palestinian women in the borderland of the checkpoint as pedagogical in order to address these questions.

The article proceeds in three main sections. In the first we provide details of the methods used in the research before discussing the sexual politics of the permit system, focusing on the requirements women must fulfil and how this relates to mobilities and participation in political, economic and cultural life. In the second section, we examine women's embodied experiences as they move through the checkpoint in proximity to Palestinian men and Israeli security staff. The third section focuses on checkpoint crossings made with children to discuss the effects of security

architecture on relations of care in Palestine. In discussing this aspect of crossing we show that the checkpoint governs care in two key ways: by regulating who can or cannot receive medical treatment, and by positioning women as primary care-givers to accompany sick family members. The main argument of the article is therefore that women's lives are profoundly affected by checkpoints and permit systems in terms of highly gendered impositions of (im)mobility, embodied experience and relations of care. We conclude with explication of the main contributions of the article to do with how the checkpoint brings the politics of gender and occupation to the fore, and how security infrastructure connects to the politics of care under military occupation.

1. Permits and the governance of women's mobility

The paper is based on fieldwork in the village of Al-Walaja in the Bethlehem Governorate. Al-Walaja is located near the Green Line on the north-west side of Bethlehem, around 8km south of Jerusalem's Old City. Approximately 2400 people live in the village (UNRWA, 2013) that lost 75% of its land in 1948 and has lost further land since to the nearby settlements and the construction of the Wall (see Joronen, 2019). Nearby is Checkpoint 300, one of the largest checkpoints in the West Bank that has in recent years been upgraded to 'checkpoint terminal' status (see Griffiths & Repo, 2018; Rijke & Minca, 2018; 2019). Fieldwork began with a meeting with the head of the Women's Group in Al-Walaja, Lamees,¹ to co-design a set of questions that would examine and fairly represent women's experiences of crossing Checkpoint 300. Lamees was then engaged as a paid research assistant to carry out interviews, mostly by herself but other times accompanied by a second research assistant, Tariq, and the authors for two final focus groups. Interviews were conducted in Arabic and recorded, Tariq acted as transcriber and translator. Lamees is a prominent member of the Women's Group while Tariq, a long-time friend and collaborator, is related to one of the group's facilitators; this helped build trust between the women and us. Lamees's work on the research was crucial, particularly for the fact that she was able to elicit deeply thoughtful responses from other women in Al-Walaja in a way that, as two European 'outsiders', would not have been possible had we conducted the interviews ourselves. The study included 12 in-depth interviews and two focus groups where the authors were able to ask follow-up questions. In total, 15 women were included in the research; their ages ranged from 28 to 50 and all of them are married with two to six children. We did not collect individual details of socio-economic status but during the focus groups it was made clear to us that the route of the Wall through Al-Walaja's agricultural land has threatened livelihoods for everyone in the village such that many of the men are now employed as labourers in East Jerusalem and Israel and women have taken on extra

familial responsibilities and political-cultural activities, such as those of the Women's Group (see Griffiths & Repo 2020).

The Women's Group works, through collective participation, to strengthen social unity by cultivating village land and upcycling wood and plastic into furniture and other objects. The group's profile has grown recently via links with international development agencies and an emerging internet presence,² and it has become a crucial collective for the expression of women's political agency that coheres with a long tradition of activism and resistance in Palestine (see e.g. Peteet, 1991; Richter-Devroe, 2018; Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2009). By emphasizing this aspect of the group we intend to preface the discussion that while the analysis focuses on oppressive infrastructures of security, the women's agency is evident in their collective political and cultural activities. In one of the follow-up focus groups this was made clear to us by Suad, who gave a clear instruction: 'don't write about [only] victims, we want a story told and [political] change'. Aside from this article, our commitment to the Women's Group is to publish a non-academic article in Arabic, written with Tariq, along with infographics to be used in the group's advocacy work both in Palestine and internationally. We include these methodological details as evidence of an approach to research that is orientated towards participants' meaningful participation in research methods (Pain, 2004) and of an attempt to work ethically with different researcher positionalities in the field (Griffiths, 2017). No perfect solution exists but we have made every effort to conduct ethical work on a research agenda shaped as much as possible by participants in the field.

There is a noticeable divide in the way men and women from Al-Walaja cross Checkpoint 300. Many working-age men cross daily to work on the other side of the Separation Wall, typically in the construction sector. The majority of crossings for women are made with one-off permits obtained at the District Coordination Office (DCO) for medical appointments in Jerusalem, for *iftar* (prayer) and they also cross when security is relaxed so as to visit Al-Aqsa Mosque, typically during Ramadan. This was the case for all of the women we interviewed, and for each purpose a granted permit and was both valued and resented. Applications for permits are processed by the Israeli Civil Administration DCO and are often submitted by representatives such as the village council or the Women's Group. The process is notoriously opaque (Berda, 2017), subject to unpredictable delays (Joronen, 2017) and arbitrary refusals (B'Tselem, 2017). In this section we consider the permit system and the effects of mobility restrictions on women's participation in political, economic and cultural life.

During the interviews, each of the women were able to recount stories of not crossing due to a refused permit and successful applications were both arbitrary and relatively rare. Amani, a 48-year-old woman who is a prominent spokesperson for the Women's Group, for instance, explained how an application involves an arduous trip to the Israeli military base at Gush Etzion

(an illegal settlement inside UN-recognized Palestinian territory) where ‘it takes a whole day to get your turn and it’s absolutely exhausting’. Amani explained:

The last time I went it was very crowded ... I was waiting from 8am until 2pm when I got my turn. There was a problem that day ... so they paused the process and we had to wait another two hours until we got in to get the permit. I got my permit and finally left at 4pm. It was a very harsh day, and a cold day, and by the end of it I was totally exhausted.

Amani’s experience is a common one that is well documented as a form of ‘slow-motion’ bureaucracy that never operates to more than a bare-minimum standard in a contradictory performance of both recognizing and stalling Palestinians’ human rights (Berda, 2017; Joronen, 2017). On this occasion, however, the arduous day in a military base at least yielded a permit but it was only the beginning of the checkpoint’s capacity to encroach on women’s lives. After the time-consuming visits to the DCO, a successful visit also marks the beginning of a period of anxious waiting, as Randa described: ‘once I got [the permit] I was very happy – but it came with fear, because you get the permit and then you remember you have to go to the checkpoint and you feel like you’re going to a prison’. Randa, Amani and the others were able to recount many other occasions, however, when there would be no such anticipatory fear because a permit was not granted, for instance, Amani: ‘planned a day trip last year with other women in Al-Walaja to Jerusalem’ with the result: ‘we applied three times as a women’s [cultural] group ... and we were rejected all three times’. On these occasions, the permit process constitutes a barrier before the barrier – or what Julie Peteet (2017: 85) has termed ‘a paper wall of bureaucracy’ – that preemptively excludes women even from the exclusionary space of the checkpoint itself.

There are two main grounds on which women’s applications are more readily accepted: for medical appointments and for *iftar* (prayer). This, according to Karima, a 28-year-old member of the Women’s Group, is the chief difference in men’s and women’s experience of the checkpoint:

First of all, there are more men that have permits than women, so they can pass and go to work. For women, you have to have some kind of medical document because even for family visits, you don’t get a permit, so men have more chances because of their labour. But for us, we only get a permit when it’s Ramadan or hospital – or we don’t get it at all.

Passage for prayer is granted to women on some Fridays through the year and permit regulations are relaxed during Ramadan. For medical appointments, women cross the checkpoint either for their own clinical care or to accompany children or husbands to appointments in Jerusalem. Significantly, none of the women had been accompanied on their own appointments, that is, they can only act as carers and not cared-for. Immediately clear, therefore, is that mobility via the checkpoint is granted on condition of piety and care and not, for instance, for the cultural and economic activities of the Al-Walaja Women’s Group for whom, as Amani recounted above, permission has been repeatedly denied. What is particularly notable on this point is that the women

we interviewed in Al-Walaja are varyingly engaged in part-time work, the village council, and all of them were dedicated to the carpentry practised at their workshop. This is not to say, of course, that there is not a clear sexual division of labour in the village, but it is to highlight that – even despite (or because of) the obviously broad cultural and political interests of Al-Walaja’s Women’s Group – the Israeli Civil Administration’s permit system effects sex discrimination that circumscribes the nature of the women’s visibility in Jerusalem and beyond: these Palestinian women can only cross the checkpoint as either a devout Muslim woman or a devoted and caring wife or mother.

But even these roles are limited; having a permit guarantees nothing and the likely and frequent refusal of a permit in the DCO is compounded by the likely and frequent refusal of passage inside the checkpoint itself. The uncertainty that this instils is evident in Randa’s permit that, in her words, ‘brings instant fear’ in anticipation of an inevitably nerve-wracking exchange in the checkpoint. Randa’s nervous anticipation is consistent with a broader proliferation of anxiety-inducing security strategies of maintaining uncertainty in Palestine (Hammami, 2016; Joronen & Griffiths, 2019) – and beyond (Adey & Anderson, 2012; Massumi, 2005) – and on many occasions is well-founded. Tala found this to be the case when she was subject to arbitrary application of an opaque rule:

Once during Ramadan, when they [the Israeli Civil Administration] announced that all women could pass through any day I went to the checkpoint based on that assumption. When I arrived the soldier said I was forbidden from passing. When I asked why, he said that I was not 50 years old! I told him: ‘at Ramadan women below 50 can pass!’. He started yelling at me: ‘go back, go back!’. On this occasion I responded that I do not want to become 50 – I was 45 at the time – and I did not want to pass. It’s unjust – I was angry and returned home.

Towards Tala, the soldier acted as a ‘petty sovereign’ making ‘unilateral decisions’ with impunity (Butler, 2004: 56) but Tala did not, in this instance, regret that she asserted her political agency, even as speaking out cost her mobility that particular day. Other women spoke about this aspect of dealing with checkpoint soldiers as decision-makers and silence-enforcers: Randa commented ‘for a woman it’s difficult because they body scan and humiliate you while you have to keep your mouth shut’ and Karima reasoned: ‘when they prevent me [from crossing] I want to know why ... if I argue they might change their mind but if they’re stubborn and decide to deny me entry, especially when I have kids, I won’t make a scene because I might be arrested or taken away’. Based on these experiences we can add detail to the claim above – that women’s mobility is dependent on a particular subject position to do with piety and care-giver – by recognizing that passage is dependent on the woman, in Randa’s words ‘keep[ing her] mouth shut’ – or maintaining the familiar silence of the submissive or subaltern colonized woman (Spivak, 1988; Griffiths, 2018).

Nevertheless, even as women strategically adopt such subject positions of political muteness, their mobility and visibility are never guaranteed. Just as Tala and Karima shared stories

of denied passage, so too did each of the twelve women included in the research. Randa was denied passage ‘many times’, even for *iftar* at Al Aqsa mosque; Hayam has been denied travel to attend medical appointments in Jerusalem; and Nariman related a similar case where her daughter was denied entry: ‘she was distraught because she missed a doctor’s appointment ... it was horrible – they are in [complete] control of us ...’. Karima was also able to elaborate on the ways that even in the role of Muslim woman and mother, too often passing through the checkpoint is not possible because of the difficulty she anticipates:

I often can’t visit Al Aqsa on a Friday in Ramadan because I can’t take the kids along because it would be exhausting for them and you can’t leave them alone at home because I might get stuck on the way and not sure about what time I would come back ... This year I gave up my only opportunity to go there. Other sacrifices are always there, like visits, travelling. The mother gives all her life and time to her kids at home to make sure her kids don’t feel left out because we can’t always cross. Therefore often the mother stays with the kids at home.

Karima thus explicates an emergent theme in the interviews discussed so far: the checkpoints effects various kinds of restrictions on women’s lives. They are prevented from political activities, as evidenced in the Women’s Group’s repeated denial of permits; cultural and leisure trips, as in the case of Karima; medical care (e.g. Hayam, Nariman’s daughter); and religious visits to the important Al Aqsa mosque (e.g. Randa, Tala).

As a consequence of these challenging and unpredictable conditions of mobility, seven of the twelve women who were part of the research have decided not to use the checkpoint except for urgent medical care. This is the case, for example, for Amani: ‘I wanted to apply for a permit to go to Jerusalem but I realised that it was an awful hassle, so I didn’t apply’. For Amani, her own and the experiences of Randa, Hayam and others discussed above have become an effective deterrent: ‘according to what people have said lately about crossing the checkpoint, it’s a struggle. Some women went through with their children and said it was very difficult and exhausting and they would never do it again ... there isn’t a line for women’. Amani herself has decided too: ‘as a middle aged woman, I felt like it’s a struggle to try and go through. With what I heard, it sounded very difficult and requires a lot of effort and I don’t want to’; as did Nariman (after breaking down in tears in a case we discuss below): ‘from that day I decided to never go again ...’; and Hanan: ‘I wished to go but [because of] the fear of soldiers ... I stopped applying for a permit’. The checkpoint therefore also functions as a deterrent, as not only the (very strong) ‘paper wall’ (Peteet, 2017: 85) we reference above but a symbolic wall that effects enclosure from afar: women are deterred by the permit process, and by the prospect of an exhausting, unpredictable crossing that never guarantees entry into Jerusalem. As noted by Rema Hammami (2015: 5): ‘the logic of power materialised through the checkpoint regime aims to create a constant state of uncertainty (is it open or closed? Does this permit work or not? What’s the mood of the soldiers?). Rather than an effect of it, this constant state of uncertainty is the very logic of Israeli sovereign violence that

checkpoints instantiate, as well as produce'. Hammami (2019, 88) documents this elsewhere as partly a 'checkpoint of the mind' that is aimed at 'a constant state of uncertainty and anxiety' and thus something towards a discursive, internalized border whose effects on identity are felt through extended spatialities and temporalities (Balibar, 2002).

2. Women's embodied experiences at the checkpoint

As discussed so far, the permit system and checkpoint work to delimit the mobility of women in Al-Walaja and also discipline womanhood into restricted types seen as permissible for crossing, i.e. caring and/or pious. The women's bodies, therefore, are in part constituted through Israeli state security practices that determine 'the parameters and possibilities for embodied subjectivity' (Wilcox, 2015: 12). Moreover, the process of moving through the checkpoint involves intrusion, intimidation and violence that are not imposed on an already established body but rather, as Lauren Wilcox (2015: 15) has written convincingly: 'various forms of violence are part and parcel of the production of the various bodies that are subjected to violence'. In this section, we discuss the testimonies of the women in relation to the politics of embodiment.

The architecture of Checkpoint 300 is crucial for understanding the co-constitution of bodies and security infrastructure, as the packed corridors, security technologies and policing practices inside the checkpoint make it a threatening space for all Palestinians (see Rijke & Minca, 2018: 39). Of the twelve women we interviewed, nine of them felt that this was differentiated and that crossing is more difficult for women. Lamees, for example, spoke about how if she were a man she could 'jump like them over the fence and skip the queue' and that women are by default at a bodily disadvantage in the queue. This dynamic of the checkpoint pointed to the ways that it can constitute a particularly inhospitable space for women's bodies. For instance, the very presence of Palestinian women at the checkpoint can be questioned by men. As Tala recalls: 'some men shame women who pass the checkpoint for work, and they don't understand that we are passing for medical purposes, the *unskilled workers* start questioning why we are at the checkpoint and so on ...'. Tala's comment here emphasizes the strong association of the checkpoint with the facilitation of male labour mobility and how the men she encountered also regard its primary purpose – in a way that is consistent with the Israeli permit system that privileges (and exploits) labour-able men – as serving their employability, with reasons why women might also want or need to cross not being always apparent, or accepted.

A notable counter to this that is also represented in the interviews, however, is a recurrent practice of men in the crowded space seeking to make women's crossings more bearable, such as Ameera described: '[some men] when [they] see a woman approaching and wanting to pass, the

men open the way for her to go right through' (see also Hammami, 2015). The contradictory dynamic between here and above can be mapped onto geographically differentiated but nonetheless discernible cultural norms that women feminist writers in Palestine have documented and negotiated. For example, in addition to the considerable discriminatory practices of the Israeli state described so far, Palestinian women are heralded as – simultaneously and somewhat paradoxically – leaders of anti-colonial struggle (see e.g. Jean-Klein, 2003; Peteet, 1991); the reproducers of family life (and the nation) (e.g. Yuval-Davis, 1996); and the upholders of religious norms of femininity (e.g. Abu-Duhou, 2003; Amireh, 2011). We might thus make links to the right to pass judgement assumed by the 'unskilled workers' described by Tala, who 'shame' women in public spaces, and also to the deferential gestures of facilitating passage ('opening the way') described by Ameera. In substance, this means that women can be received in different ways in the checkpoint: Palestinian men show some inconsistency as they alternatively 'open the way' or 'shame' women, while Israeli security staff, as we discuss in detail below, more consistently adopt practices of intimidation and humiliation.

To ease women's crossing, and that of other groups such as children, disabled people and the elderly, there is a humanitarian lane in addition to the general entry lane, but it is often closed at the whim of the guards (Rijke & Minca, 2018, 39–40), forcing all groups to join the crowded general queue.³ Even when this lane is open, however, the experience of crossing can be onerous. As Ameera described her attempt to cross during Ramadan last year when 'women were locked up on the other side of the gate'. It was so difficult that

... I broke down in tears and I started climbing the cement walls to get out of the crowd. I am tall compared to other women – shorter women with children had a tougher time. They squeezed us in the crowd so that no one could go forwards or backwards, it was rough. And from that day I decided to never go again... There was no mercy [from checkpoint staff].

Ameera's experience highlights that a woman's body is subjected to quite extreme physical restriction, unable to move and subordinated entirely to the (non-existent) mercy of the soldiers. The usual case, though, is that the humanitarian lane is closed and, predictably, this renders the crossing all the more dangerous for women. Suad described how in the general queue during Ramadan, she found herself in a space of physical harm: 'I was pushed against the metal bars at the sides of the line, and I was injured. My side was bruised'.

Once these crowded lanes have been negotiated – and bodily harm sustained – the exposure to harm turns psychological in the 'contact zone' between colonizer and colonized where soldiers routinely subject the women to intimidating and humiliating practices, for instance when passing through the metal detectors. In an account from Suad, she stressed a 'very common' occurrence that she witnessed at Checkpoint 300:

There was a woman in front of me who kept making the metal detector go off. Again and again she was sent back by the soldier [through a loud speaker] to take something off and try again, it happened so many times. She took off so many things that she got scared and started crying. I told her to not be scared and asked the men to go back so we could lift her cover dress ... It was terrible – it's a struggle and a humiliation, especially for a woman.

In this case, women's fear stemmed from the invasion of bodily privacy and the threat to corporeal sovereignty. The woman described by Suad was eventually allowed to pass through but not without a significant amount of stress that Israeli military personnel routinely visit on Palestinian people. The mistreatment of women often rests on the specific cultural and religious bodily norms/practices that are purposefully ignored or abused by checkpoint staff. Inside the part of the checkpoint where security checks are made, men and women are, according to Suad, 'usually forced to be pushed against each other even though we try to prevent it' and the discomfort from crowdedness does not abate: 'they [the soldiers] don't care that it's not allowed for a woman to get crammed too close to a man' (Hanan).

In each of these cases, the source of the women's discomfort was that their bodies are forced into intimate proximity with men and then subjected to close scrutiny by Israeli security staff. On such scrutiny, Suad provided a particularly illustrative example:

It's so crowded and there are men and women, so usually we are forced to be pushed against each other even though we try to prevent it. And when you pass the first gate you go through a metal door to the metal detector. Sometimes you have to take everything off, including a hair tie ... so it is a struggle and a humiliation, especially for a women. Sometimes she's taken aside to be searched by a female soldier, and sometimes it's a small thing that makes the machine go off like a piece of metal in your shoe that you can't see. ... It feels submissive ... they humiliate us as much as possible.

This type of behaviour is, apparently, commonplace when Muslim Palestinians enter the checkpoint, as Irus Braverman (2011: 278) has noted: 'the physical design of [checkpoints] excludes many Palestinians, especially traditional Muslim women, who usually refrain from physical contact with male strangers'. The humiliation goes further, however, as the soldiers subject the women to intensely personal bodily judgements, ones that seem orientated to exact a clear colonized-colonizer privilege to render admissible and non-admissible body types, such as for Randa:

Once the family agreed to have *iftar* in Jerusalem ... I was already afraid and then they started questioning me about my name and why my picture on the permit did not look like me, because I was overweight. So I told them that I lost weight, and they kept staring at me in a scary way, making me wait and leaving me really nervous.

From this it is clear that the checkpoint security staff degrade and enervate women in the space of the checkpoint, that they exercise total control of the women's right to present themselves as they wish and that this is routinely expressed in the order to remove items of clothing in the area for body scans. The significance of this order is quite starkly evident in Hayam's account:

When I last went to the checkpoint I was nervous because of *unexpected* issues, I had fears of the unexpected. *Anything* can be done by the soldiers on the checkpoint that would put me in trouble. When it was my turn to pass, the soldier told me to pass through the metal detector. I was wearing something that had metal on it and I had to keep trying, it made me nervous because of how many times I had to do it. Eventually it was my shoelace – they'd made me take off my shoes and other clothes in order to pass. After I passed they started asking for my ID in Hebrew, a language I don't know so I did not understand what she wanted. She started yelling at me, I was scared of her and the people around me who understood Hebrew told me to show my ID card ...

Hayam brings many of the themes together here: the anticipatory fears of the 'unexpected'; the submission to security staff seemingly intent on inducing stress and anxiety; the right of the 'petty sovereign' to do 'anything [they wish]' and the targeting of the body in this process. Hayam, like all of the women we interviewed, and understandably for many people in Palestine and everywhere, feels a profound unease at undressing in security spaces. This unease contributes to an embodied aspect of her subjectivity as a Palestinian woman in the checkpoint as subjugated, degraded, scared. It is in this way that the female body is produced in the checkpoint, as one that is exposed to stress and harm and, as we move on to discuss in the following section, subjected to elevated levels of threat by the enforced fact that so many of their crossings are made with children.

3. Crossing with children: Administering and disrupting relations of care

As discussed above, one of the main reasons that women apply for permits (both for them and their care dependents) is for access to essential medical care in Jerusalem. The checkpoint and the permit system therefore govern care in two ways: by regulating who can or cannot receive medical treatment, and by positioning women as primary care-givers to accompany sick family members. The checkpoint thus also operates as an apparatus that administers Palestinian access to and relations of care, often by impeding them. A further dimension of this is the regulation of everyday care women provide as mothers. For many women, making a difficult journey alone is hard enough to deter them from going again, and it is even more burdensome for those accompanied by their children. In this final section we discuss the checkpoint as a security mechanism that disrupts and regulates relations of care in Palestine.

For primary care-givers, mainly women, the checkpoint presents a significant challenge both physically and logistically. Pregnant women, first of all, are given no special consideration at the checkpoint. As Karima recalled:

The Israeli soldiers don't consider your situation, whether you're pregnant, or with kids, or older. One time, my mother-in-law was with me and I was pregnant, and it was really, really difficult for us. Half of us went through, and the other half was stuck in the crowd. I was stuck too ... because of the soldiers. They didn't care about the crowd and they didn't help, they don't care about women, pregnant women, children, or anything else.

On this crossing, Karima was able to negotiate eventual passage but the threat was enough to not only heighten her nervousness but also, once again, to act as a deterrent: ‘I will never try again while pregnant’ (Karima).⁴ The experience does not get easier with motherhood, however. Physically, the very architecture of the building, with its turnstiles and metal detectors, is ‘unforgiving for people travelling with young children’ (Griffiths & Repo, 2018: 21), especially those in prams, pushchairs or wheelchairs (Kotef, 2015: 47). In addition, because of the queues and lack of care cited by Karima (and others) shown by soldiers for women with children, the challenge of keeping track of children and ensuring their safety in the middle of a crowd came up repeatedly in the interviews, as Lamees recounted:

When we went to the checkpoint, the kids were in front of us and there were lots of people, nobody knew how to move forward, people were pushing each other and *my children had trouble breathing* because of the number of people and being stuck, not moving, we passed through the narrow lane and got stopped at the gate where each individual, one by one, has to pass through that gate. *I didn’t know where my kids were.*

In crowded times, therefore, the checkpoint can be a particularly dangerous space for children. The confusion (‘I didn’t know where my kids were’) and danger (‘my children had trouble breathing’) demand extra exertions from women looking after their children. Randa similarly – and quite starkly – described on another occasion having to ‘hold them [her children] up in the air so they can breathe’ when there is a lot of traffic. None of the women we interviewed had ever received any concessions to ease passage when crossing with children. This jeopardizes the women’s abilities to protect, as Ameera stated: ‘the soldiers ignore the fact that it’s crowded and there is no consideration that there are children with us. Women cannot protect their children from the crowdedness’. Mothers, with a deep-felt responsibility to ensure the safety of their children, are thus made to feel helpless to do so in the checkpoint, where soldiers intimidate women and – directly or by proxy – children alike. The permit system also makes itself felt in this respect, as Randa put it, ‘the soldiers are scary, they scream... Because each child must have their own permit, so when they pass they have to wait for their mothers’. In this way, maternal care and responsibility are subordinated to the disciplinary command of the security apparatus.

The permit system makes itself felt further as families who endure and negotiate the crowd then run the risk of being separated at the identity-check booths. Just as there is never a guarantee that a Palestinian with a permit crossing alone will be let through, individual family members may also be denied entry when making the journey together. This has a significant effect for women as it heightens the fear-inducing capacities of the checkpoint and its security staff, as Randa made clear: ‘there is a lot of fear, and we and our children are part of the process’. Here she recalled being separated from her son en route to a family outing in Jerusalem:

I had my seven-year-old son with me and he was allowed to pass. It was very difficult, he was holding my hand and I was not allowed to go through. He would not let go of me [because] he wanted to be with me. Eventually he had to go on with his aunts so I gave him some pocket money and told him to go ahead... But he was in tears the whole time while with them in Jerusalem and he did not have fun at all because his mother was denied to spend the day with him. I had to go back home and stay on my own.

The checkpoint's arbitrary processes can therefore disrupt not only basic family plans and events, but also intimate family relationships, especially those centred on care, such as that between mothers and their children. Randa described the incident as 'the most difficult situation in [her] life', adding: 'when I am denied access with my children, then I am not there for them. I am not allowed to pass with my husband, so I am not there for him. So if they pass and I don't, then I have no role to play in their lives that day'.

There were further accounts of anguish, confusion and worry caused by separation. Karima recollected a similar experience to that of Randa at Eid, a time when security checks are supposedly relaxed for women: 'I took the kids and went towards the checkpoint. It was overcrowded as always. That day we got separated. Two of the children passed and I and one of them was stuck in the checkpoint. I had to search the crowds! It was really horrible'. Suad, like the other women, is familiar with such separation and cites it as a something that makes her feel 'uncomfortable and constantly sad and disappointed' because, 'for example, when you want to cross with your children, and they let all of us pass but only one is denied access, you have to go back with them. Especially because they're young, and can't get back alone, it makes you feel very bitter'. This disruption frequently makes the women 'so sad you want to cry' (Hanan) and, as is clear from these accounts, exacerbates the checkpoint-as-deterrent function we discuss in the first section and also heightens the anxiety-inducing function we discuss in the second section above, a claim that Amani substantiates by stating: 'with children it's exhausting and more scary and I will never do it again'. Hanan gave more detail on this:

We [she and her daughters] will never do it again, because the soldiers torment us then they search us ... One of my girls told me 'I have never been in a situation like this one', cramming and shoving between men. It was scary and my girls were scared. For this reason, they don't like going to Jerusalem.

This serves also to highlight the wider political implications through the notion that young Palestinians are deterred from visiting their most important city, Jerusalem – a fact that has obvious resonance in the ongoing colonial significance of the city and its current and contended status as Israel's 'eternal undivided capital to the exclusion of the Palestinian population' (see Said, 1995b).

The discussion in this section sheds further light on 'the wider sociopolitical functions of barriers' and what the checkpoints do 'beyond blockading' (Pallister-Wilkins, 2016: 155). We get a clear sense of the ways that women's interactions with and within the checkpoint are profoundly

shaped by their role as care-givers and, in turn, how these roles are challenged and delegitimized by crowdedness and security checks. At base, the challenges faced by women are amplified to the extent that claims that crossing ‘for *all* Palestinians’ is an anxious experience must be understood from a specific perspective of care giving: facing the inhumane and subordinating process of crossing the checkpoint is rendered all the more anxiety-inducing when undertaken in the role of mother, or protector of children from the harmful environment of the checkpoint.

CONCLUSION

In many ways there is nothing remarkable about the women’s experiences in the checkpoint except to add women’s voices to the swathe of writing from a Palestinian perspective that considers checkpoints something of a ‘quintessential Palestinian experience’ that have profound effects on Palestinian sensibilities (Khalidi, 2010: 1–2; also: Abourahme, 2011: 453; Barghouti, 2008). What is remarkable, however, is how the women experience the checkpoint in a markedly different way *as women* – and women in current literatures do not seem to form part of this ‘quintessential’ experience. Our objective has been to complement existing work that discusses women and checkpoints (e.g. Hammami, 2015; 2019; Peteet, 2017; Richter-Devroe, 2011; Rijke and Minca, 2018; Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2015) by bringing women to the centre of a discussion of permits, checkpoints and their gendered effects on (im)mobility, embodied experience and relations of care. The study, we hope, adds evidence and texture to existing accounts while also building new knowledge of how the checkpoint brings the politics of gender and occupation to the fore, and how security infrastructure connects to the politics of care in the context of military occupation.

As we show in the first section, the permit system and mobility restrictions curtail women’s participation in political, economic and cultural life. In the second, we focused on the politics of embodiment to elaborate further on restricted mobilities by showing how the body becomes a site of disciplining femininity into restricted types seen as permissible for crossing, i.e. caring and/or pious. The third section developed this notion by considering crossings with children to draw out the ways that the checkpoint functions as a security mechanism that disrupts and regulates relations of care in Palestine. Brought together, the analysis builds knowledge about checkpoints in three important ways: i) as gendered spaces that regulate women’s mobility differently from that of men; ii) as spaces that produce particular embodied experiences for women; and iii) as security mechanisms that disrupt and regulate relations of care. This knowledge makes visible previously obscured aspects of women’s lives in the ‘contact zones’ (Pratt, 1991) and ‘borderlands’ (Anzaldúa, 1987) that are created by Israel’s security infrastructure in Palestine.

The borderland, Gloria Anzaldúa (1987: 19) writes, is ‘not a comfortable territory to live in, this place of contradiction’. The dividing line of the Wall and its checkpoints constitute both a

violent boundary as well as an ‘open wound’ (1987: 18) in which bodies are both constituted and regulated. In this contact zone, the oppressions faced by Palestinian women are not easy to perceive in terms of a clear hierarchy. Rather, the checkpoint brings different forms of patriarchal power into motion. The arising tensions act on and through the body, shaping both the embodied experience of Palestinian women as well as their relations with others and the world around them. Palestinian women confront the colonial subjugation of the checkpoint from the paradoxical position of being hailed as vessels of reproductive resistance to the occupation on the one hand while being subordinated to patriarchal formations on the other. Seen principally as carers (as mothers and wives) by both systems, this also forms the primary condition of their mobility across the checkpoint. Inside the checkpoint, their sameness with Palestinian men subjects them to equally humiliating treatment from Israeli soldiers, while their sexual difference makes them vulnerable to sexually and religiously cognizant violations of bodily integrity. Put together, the checkpoint reproduces women’s roles as caregivers, while at the same time actively disrupting the relations of care that form the very condition for women’s mobility. Women must therefore both inhabit circumscribed subject positions in order to be legitimately mobile subjects while also submitting to the fact that legitimizing process can and will be obstructed in an intimidating and humiliating fashion.

Attending to these power dynamics in a specific borderland, the account provided here makes the important contributions of showing how the checkpoint constitutes a space where women encounter the contradictory politics of gender and occupation. Women in Palestine are figured variously as victims of ‘irrational and unpredictably violent’ Palestinian men (Ryan, 2017: 478); bearers of responsibility in the demographic/reproductive imperative of the nation (Abu-Duhou, 2003); and as threatening covert operatives (‘suicide bombers’) ready to self-detonate in a quest for *shahida* (martyrdom) (Amireh, 2011). Each of these contradictory constructions are in evidence in the space of the checkpoint as women are simultaneously revered, shamed and intimidated in varying but consistent measures. We thus get a clear sense also of how Palestinian women-as-carers are positioned not only within [their] ‘own’ immediate patriarchy but also to that of the occupier [and that] Israel has a long history of exploiting, violating and exacerbating already uneven gender relations within the Occupied Territories’ (Griffiths & Joronen, 2019: 164). In this way the borderland most closely resembles the wound so evocatively described by Anzaldúa (1987: 18) where, to draw on her metaphor, the patriarchal wound ‘grates against’ another and haemorrhages, as women’s subordination is amplified again and again in the checkpoint that constitutes the ‘border culture’ of colonial occupation.

Broadening analysis of this and other border cultures with close attention to women’s lives is the clear and pressing area of future inquiry indicated here. The women of Al-Walaja are produced as a particular sort of woman, via both a restrictive permit system and the physical

architecture of the checkpoint that ensures they are consigned to a subordinate role both within the colonial bureaucratic and security architecture and, in part as consequence, within Palestinian society. It is here that further research is needed: as a deterrent, as a tether to domestic life, as a significant factor in arranging care-giving relations, checkpoints profoundly affect women's everyday lives in hitherto untold ways. A future research agenda must focus on the extended spatialities and temporalities of security architecture and the broader implications for women in Palestine and others in the context of gendered (im)mobility, embodied experience and relations of care.

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Notes

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Notes

¹ On agreement with the women involved in the study, all names in this article are pseudonyms.

² See: www.tellerreport.com/news/--the-palestinian-walaja-women---a-small-project-tells-their-story-to-the-germans-.Bk1kwihVN.html.

³ In more than twenty visits to the checkpoint, we have not seen the humanitarian lane open.

⁴ For a full discussion of Israel's severe mistreatment and targeting of women's pregnant and birthing bodies at checkpoints see Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian's (2015) vivid description and analysis.